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ABSTRACT

The essay explores the common threads that wove through John Dewey's "Art as Experience" and "Logic: The Theory of Inquiry" (published 1934 and 1938 respectively). Both works were parts of a system of ideas, not isolated books as some critics suggest. In order to show that there is a common basis for Dewey's two books, literature that has surfaced since 1938 is reviewed. This literature shows how Dewey's theory of aesthetics (in "Art") was received. The essay then goes on to present and analyze some commentaries on "Logic." Dewey built aesthetic appreciation into the experience of the individual; he then attempted to analyze that experience as part of a social network. In the inquiry process, beliefs would be refined and defined as the individual encountered others with differing beliefs. Dewey's later publication naturally resulted from and expanded upon the first. Contains 23 references. (EH)

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The Unity In Dewey's Aesthetics and Logic

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The following essay will explore the common threads that weave through John Dewey's Art as Experience (hereafter Art) and Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (hereafter Logic). Although many commentators treat the works as though there is, or should be, a cleavage between the theory espoused in Art and Logic, I shall argue that such a schism is untenable and that both works are parts of a whole. To show that there is a common basis for Dewey's two works, this essay will review some of the literature that has surfaced since the release of Art (in 1934) and Logic (in 1938). Taking Art first, we shall observe how Dewey's theory of aesthetics was received, then some commentaries of Logic will be explored.

Dewey's Art is representative of his biological slant on pragmatic philosophy. Dewey posits that we, as humans, are living creatures and as such we are engaged in a reciprocity with our environment. We are social beings. This in effect is Dewey's metaphysics, or rather his non-metaphysics. Dewey has a philosophy that depends on the natural environment in which humans operate. There are no supernatural realms, no a priori systems, and no egocentric idealisms in Dewey's philosophy. In short, he is a naturalist. In Art we are all individuals facing the world and interacting with it, whereby knowledge is extracted from the world by experimentation, i.e. through experience.[1] Each and every human is given licence to find his own way, to make his own judgement. Dewey's aesthetics, as expressed in Art, falls in line with his general conception of a human's relationship to the world around him.

In Art, Dewey strives to bring the lofty ivory tower conceptions of aesthetic ideals down to earth. Often it is the case, in philosophy of art, that criticism is the crux of the theory. That is, aesthetic theory often resorts to employing a string of ought statements as the main focus, preaching about what art should be. Dewey shies away from this to give us a theory of art that has a social psychological perspective. In the words of Faison:

> Instead of starting with works assumed to be masterpieces and searching for a common denominator, [Dewey] starts with elementary and everyday experiences and discovers an aesthetic property therein, of which the work of art is merely more complete, profound, and lucid expression. [2]

Lofty perches of eagle eyed art critics are given up for the ground floor galleries of common experience. The focus on common experience is Dewey's aim. The common man is freed to see for himself what he finds aesthetic.

Other commentators of Art have made observations similar to Faison's concerning the roots of Dewey's philosophy. For example, Goldwater states that:

> In accordance with his philosophy as a whole, Dewey is not writing upon the arts as finished products but upon the arts as the natural outcome of human experience as a whole.[3]

This is to say that, the process of appreciating art takes the forefront in Dewey's philosophy of art, rather than the finished product that someone has deemed a 'work of art'. Yet, Art is not a theory of art.

Ballard points out that "the true direction of Dewey's interests is not theoretical at all." [4] Morgan seems in full agreement with Ballard in a review of his article. Morgan summarizes thus:

> Dewey is said to move between the horns of the theoretical dilemma constructing 'a kind of inter-theory, occupying a position midway between a frankly abstract theory and experience itself and manifesting something of the characteristics of both.' [5]

Dewey is attacking the ivory tower approach to art and is attempting to establish a naturalistic idea of art based on common aesthetic experiences. An aesthetic experience is not something that is had on demand. The art critic can not tell someone when and where to have an aesthetic experience. The individual himself experiences art when he does so - period.

The attack upon the ivory tower conception of bourgeois art and the theoreticians that hold-up the facade of the "True" masterpieces seemed to be a popular theme in 1934. Dewey was praised in several places for advocating "proletarian themes" in the aesthetic arena. The year of 1933 saw the trough of a devastating world wide depression that fueled many socialist oriented "people" movements, of which the "New Deal" was one example. In the following year, Art was published. Commentaries by Burke and Prall are permeated by zealous social consciousness. Sandwiched between articles entitled "Revolution by Water" and "A Story of the Gutter," Burke draws some astounding implications from Dewey's Art, especially the chapter on "Criticism and Perception." In "Esthetic Strain" Burke reveals a possible subtext to Art. Burke makes much of the inclusion of proletarian themes in works of art. He even goes as far as to state:

> Professor Dewey's closing chapter offers grounds for believing that the end of private control over the fruits of scientific inventiveness is the paramount opening step required before science can become a genuine instrument of benefit and the present anguish of the arts can abate. [6]

Prall writing in a more "scholarly" journal seems to acknowledge a similar social under current (albeit in a much more conservative manner). [7]

The Beards, in their opus America in Midpassage, also give credit to Dewey for a democratization of aesthetics. In giving the aesthetic experience a social setting, Dewey has also given it a political setting upon which "art finds in the freedom, tolerance, mobility, and respect for labor,

which characterize a democratic society, conditions favorable to inspiration and expression." [8]

Dewey's Art begins with a setting of his perspective on the human condition. The human experience is a social one. The idea of experience is a two-fold concept, both of which are rooted in the undeniable social dimensions of life. The first aspect of experience is a general conception of it. Dewey states: "Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living." [9] The continual inundation of sensory stimulus that is 'emitted from the external world to each individual is experience. The second aspect of experience that Dewey discusses is an experience. In contrast with the general aspect of experience, an experience occurs when the individual has something that can be separated from other experiences. An experience is not merely the myriad of sensations of general experiencing, but is a whole within itself. Experiences become an experience when there is a closure, a unity, that marks it apart from other experiences. A solution to a problem, a game of chess played through, and the feeling that one has when he is reunited with old friends are all individual wholes that can be classified as an experience. They are meaningful experiences. Meaningful by virtue of their completeness, dubbed so by the particular experiencer.

An experience is not a lofty ideal, it is a common occurrence that all people have. An aesthetic experience is no different. Just as we would not listen to others in 'authority' tell us what our meaningful experiences are, we should not let them tell us what our meaningful aesthetic experiences are. We decide when we have an aesthetic experience. Art can be hung in galleries, but this does not mean that pieces that are not hung cannot be aesthetic (or potential players in an aesthetic experience). Dewey desires to close the elitist separation of true (gallery) art and craft (folk art), letting each individual evaluate for himself what is an aesthetic object (a giver of an aesthetic experience).

Dewey seems to be saying that the 'ought,' the prescriptive, voice of authority needs to be removed; thus allowing the 'is,' the natural, the real, voice of personal experience to take office. The priority in Dewey's philosophy is given to what is experienced. What is handed down from on high as aesthetic judgement takes a back seat. Dewey's philosophy of experience constitutes a revelation that one need not follow in the footsteps of those that buy into whatever authority is selling. No longer are we sheep in need of a shepherd. We have been emancipated from an authoritative way of fixing our beliefs.

Art gives one the general picture of what Dewey is after, but some specifics need to be filled-in. There are individual processes going on that integrate the experiences emanating from the social environment and can (indeed, do) incur their own beliefs. The individual processes

themselves, the specifics, are covered in another area of Dewey's philosophy, an area to which we shall now turn.

In 1938, when Logic emerged, specific solutions to specific problems were desperately being sought. There was still a world-wide depression, values were being questioned and redefined, and the prospect of war was creeping into the world picture. A method to solve the questions of society and individuals alike had to be developed. Such a method appeared in John Dewey's Logic: The Theory of Inquiry. Dewey's method, as espoused in Logic, was an expansion of Peirce's logical theories developed several decades earlier. The time was now right for the re-delivery and expansion of those theories.

Logic attempts to further develop some of the ideas that Dewey discussed in Art. The qualitative is still an underlying theme, but in Logic there is a different focus. The new twist found in Logic is how we investigate the qualitative. The ground gained in Art is not surrendered in Logic, it is settled. Dewey moves in and completes his conquest by expanding on the ideas of the qualitative. Logic takes us beyond a mere first encounter, a feeling, a quality; into the second phase, an analysis of the feeling, the quality. Dennes points out that Logic "develops a doctrine of the unity of all explanation." [10] While Vivas declares that "with the 'Logic' Dewey has finished his 'system.'"[11] The feeling, or quality, has reached maturity in Logic.

Logic reasserts that the qualitative is not limited to the private or the individual experience, but is linked to truth as belief in a wider sense. In a community of inquirers, each individual has his own experience and comes to his own conclusions. However, an inquirer is not in a vacuum. An individual is part of a social network and truth is the result of a process within the network. As each person interacts with each other and the environment, their individual beliefs come to be in process with the beliefs of others. Dewey's naturalism re-emerges in Logic, as John Laird explains:

> Nothing should be introduced into logical theory "from outside" or "out of the blue." If we ask "from outside **what**" the answer is "from outside a biological situation of adjustment to environment" where neither the organism nor its environment is "ready-made" but where each is in process (never-ending) of mutual adjustment. [12]

The participation of an individual in a group of inquirers involves one in conflict and that conflict synthesizes a new belief. The hope is that there is a type of dialectic, a dialogue, that happens within the group, and eventually this process will lead to truth.

Similarities between Art and logic are rapidly becoming obvious. In Logic, as in Art, there emerges a focus on the socio-biological nature of human beings. The quote from Laird points this out and it is further pointed to by Felix

Kaufmann.

> An Inquiry is, like any other action, the transformation of a given situation. It is therefore appropriate for a theory of inquiry to establish first the general properties of human actions, and to determine then, within this general frame, the specific traits of inquiry. Human actions are instigated by the desire to attain a state of greater satisfaction. The end of an action is, accordingly, the transformation of a less satisfactory situation into one that is more satisfactory. [13]

In earlier writings Dewey fleshed out a theory of inquiry in general. Now, in Logic, Dewey informs his readers of the specific traits of such a theory of inquiry. This theoretical progression is in line with the application of the theory to real situations. The problem of how one arrives at a solution to a dilemma, a troublesome situation, is solved.

The scientific method emerges as the pivotal point around which his logical system moves. When one is faced with a problem, perhaps a doubt of some sort, one must first formulate that problem into a question. A hypothesis is then drawn out of this question in order to drive one to a conclusion. Consequences of the hypothesis are proposed, then tested. If the consequences ring true (they are verified through experience), then we have found a true conclusion upon which to base our beliefs. If the consequences do not follow, then it is back to the drawing board, so to speak, and redefine our hypothesis. This method provides a tool for everyone to come to their own conclusions through experience. In Art we decided what our own aesthetic experiences were, now in Logic we decide what are own beliefs are. The consequence of both texts is that we decide for ourselves what our beliefs are.

Is Dewey's Logic workable? Some have found fault with one point or another but, in general, Logic seems to have been well received. Many writers have hailed Dewey as the victor in the battle of ideas among logicians. Paul Weiss, in an article for a 1938 issue of The New Republic, states:

> There is no doubt that we have here **an effective working logic** which quite completely supplants the work of Mill and cancels out the strained attempts of many contemporary logical positivists. [14, bold lettering mine]

Even H.R. Smart seems to agree that Dewey improves upon the logical positivists. Smart acknowledges that Dewey is right in his insistence "on the necessity of a return to the concrete" in order to effectively deal with the difficulties that arise from other less applicable logical systems. [15]

The impact of Logic on the social scene is undeniable. Indeed, both Logic and Art were babies of the depression era, and both help to establish a new deal for the human race. As we have seen above, the naturalistic overtones permeate Dewey's theory. The process, the evolution, of a field of

inquiry plays a key role in his theory. And, in turn, Dewey's theory plays a role in the process. Gruen makes this clear when he states:

> No treatise on logic ever written has had as direct and vital an impact on social life as Dewey's will have once its full meaning is widely grasped. [16]

Optimism abounds as Dewey's philosophy emerges as a system supported by both Art and Logic.

In summation, the links between Art and Logic emerge once Dewey's philosophy is seen as a system of ideas and not just a set of isolated books. These links are as follows:

1) Art and Logic are works of a social theorist and reformer and as such seek a new interpretation of traditional attempts of explanation.

2) Art and Logic are parts of the same whole. Art fleshes out Dewey's theory in general, whereas Logic fills in the specifics of the theory.

3) In both Art and Logic the theoretical is pushed aside for the more practical, the more concrete.

4)In both Art and Logic we see an emphasis on the qualitative, that is an emphasis on direct experience without abstraction.

5) Both Art and Logic express a preference for a naturalistic philosophy (non-metaphysical and concrete philosophy based on the natural and social world).

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Dewey scholars can no doubt uncover other links. However the commonalities listed here are sufficient to establish that Art and Logic are not detached, but are two parts of a whole. There indeed seems to be a unity in Dewey's aesthetics and logic.

Endnotes

1. John Dewey, Art as Experience, New York: Capricorn Books, 1934, p. 15.
2. Samson Lane Faison, Yale Review Vol. 24, September 1934, p. 188.
3. Robert J. Goldwater, Nation Vol. 138, June 20, 1934, p. 711.
4. Edward G. Ballard, Tulane Studies in Philosophy Vol. 4, New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1955, p. 16.
5. Douglas N. Morgan, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 15, Dec. 1956, p. 261.
6. Burke, Kenneth, New Republic Vol. 78, April 25, 1934, p. 316.
7. D. W. Prall, The Philosophical Review, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1935, pp. 388-90.
8. Charles Austin Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, America in Midpassage, 1939, p. 766.
9. John Dewey, Art as Experience, New York: Capricorn Books, 1934, p. 35.
10. William R. Dennes, The Philosophica' ew, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1940, p. 259.
11. Eliseo Vivas, The Saturday Review o rature, Vol. 19, Nov. 5, 1938, p. 18.
12. John Laird, Mind, Vol. 48, Oct. 1939, pp. 527-36.
13. Felix Kaufmann, Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 56, Oct. 8, 1959, p. 829.
14. Paul Weiss, The New Republic, Vol. 97, Nov. 23, 1938, p. 79.
15. Harold R. Smart, Philosophical Review, Vol. 50, May 1941, p. 288.
16. William Gruen, Nation, Vol. 147, Oct. 22, 1938, p. 427.

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